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A scene witnessed in the Aiga village of Korisata is typical enough, and will illustrate the way in which the Taro cult advances. A party of visitors had arrived from the lower Kumusi, which is not more than a good day's journey from Korisata. They were of another tribe—Binandele—and the purpose of their visit was principally that of reunion with their Taro friends and propaganda for the cause. They were led by an old man Tevara, a person of some distinction and a doyen of the cult in these parts, and by a village constable named Kove, an unusually volatile and excitable character and well known to the Government for his energy.

It has been pointed out that the Taro cult is divided into a number of sects. The nature of these will be fully treated later on: it is enough at present to say that Tevara was of the *Kaiva* and Kove of the *Kivere* sect, both these words being the names of varieties of the actual taro plant. In Korisata there was already established a branch of the *Kaiva* sect under one Siavije, which though bearing the same name differed in a good many points from the *Kaiva* of the visitors, owing no doubt to a long previous divergence. Lastly there were the new converts to *Diroga*, led by my interpreter Ihipa. Thus there were four parties of Taro men in the village at one time, all united by the good fellowship which is one of the best characteristics of the movement, but all anxious to show themselves off to advantage before the others.

In the first day's demonstration Kove the village policeman was almost alone and quite overshadowed, especially by the young and enthusiastic recruits of *Diroga*. He said he would show them, however, and that night went on to a village a mile or so distant where his own *Kivere* sect was strongly represented. On the morrow, he declared, there would be a 'race', i.e. a competition, to see who danced longer and better, and who were the more numerous.

At about noon next day Kove's party, heavily rein-

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forced, made its appearance to the sound of drums and conches and their own lusty voices, and took up their stand at one end of the village. The accredited *Kivere* men formed the front rank; behind them were the drummers and singers, mere laymen; and behind these again a number of girls made use of the opportunity for displaying their charms in a dance.

The *Kivere* men carry spears. Gripping them tightly they reel, shudder, and posture, the spear struck into the ground seeming to act as some support, while their faces assume expressions of great agony, which, one sincerely hopes, are largely counterfeit. For the most part they remain stationary, though occasionally an individual will break away, and brandishing his spear, and swerving in and out among spectators and coco-nut palms, perform a frantic, staggering circle back to his place in the rank.

While these demonstrations of the power of the spirit are continuing, the arrival of the *Diroga* men is awaited from the other end of the village. This rival party has been preparing its paint and feathers and characteristic decoration of flowers or leaves, and has been practising assiduously the steps of the *Diroga* dance. Now, headed by two old adepts (both interpreters of mine who hail from the district where *Diroga* is in vogue), the new converts advance in open formation toward the waiting *Kivere* men. Their movements are full of grace: they progress at once rapidly and slowly, bounding forward a few yards and then retreating almost as far again. There are definite steps to be performed but no complicated movements; each dancer moves individually, dodging, gliding, or leaping; there is no voice heard save an occasional half-stifled ejaculation, a sort of whimper which the *Diroga* men affect; but every movement is accompanied by a thrust or jab of the slender spear, and the hollow rattles which are attached to it maintain a queer accompaniment. Resembling most a force in attack, the *Diroga* party was much more mobile than the usually solid phalanx of the *Kivere* men; their

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conduct had much more of art in it, and fewer real excesses. Considering that they were mostly novices their performance certainly did them credit. Foremost among them, and evidently very conscious of his own address, was my newly converted cook-boy, who danced far better than he cooked.

While these two parties were in a manner dancing one another down, the *Kaiva* men, though less strongly represented, were not idle. Old Tevara, head of the faction from the Kumusi, carried a magnificent spear, very weighty, and beautifully polished and feathered. This he manipulated as if in a pole dance, and performed graceful little pirouettes with his feet, all of which, to one's surprise, cost him no loss of dignity, although he was an elderly man and a very large one. Circling in and out among the bystanders he would pause from time to time to hold his spear horizontally above their heads, in a manner reminiscent of benediction. Prominent among his followers was his wife, whose movements had more velocity if less elegance, and who continually flicked the spectators with a bunch of the crimson-leafed taro medicine, *Tumeni*.

The local faction of *Kaiva* men had their main representative in Siavije, who, trotting aimlessly hither and thither between the several parties of dancers, and repeating something over and over to himself, acted a part all his own which, it is to be feared, made no great impression on the bystanders.

After the dances, antics, or paroxysms of the several sects had continued for some time, there followed a general pause in which the Korisata people, forming themselves into single file, paraded past the visitors, each man shaking the hand of every visitor in turn as he passed. Then one of the leaders of the *Diroga* delivered a harangue before Kove's party of *Kivere* men. Prancing back and forth before them and menacing them with his spear, after the manner of an Orokaiva who wishes to make his voice heard, he explained the methods of *Diroga*, and bade them

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take no offence at the swift and warlike movements which were so different from their own. Kove's party listened with great attention, punctuating the speech with tattoos on their drums and with the deep-toned cry, uttered simultaneously by all, and resembling a kind of hoot, which is the Orokaiva equivalent for 'hear, hear!' or 'Amen'. Kove the village constable made his address in reply, first insisting on a general silence, which he considered due to his status and uniform, and after that the hosts and guests, mutually satisfied, mingled and fell to upon the real taro.

Such a scene is common enough. It illustrates the keenness which the various sects feel in their Taro, and the welcome which is offered to the apostles. What with these, and with the impressionable character of the native, it is not surprising that a cult, which for whatever reason commends itself to native imagination, should spread rapidly and far.

The actual distribution of the Taro cult is in the main confined to the Orokaiva tribes. Northwards it seems to have stopped short of the Waria people, who while possessing many affinities with the Orokaiva, speak a different language. It is firmly established along the lower Gira, but on the middle Gira it seems to have made small headway, partly because of a minor cult of *Wo-embo*, or 'animal men', a clique of hunting magicians, and partly because of the long-established mission station at Peo.

Commencing from the mouth of the Mambare the movement seems to have spread at first in two principal directions—up the Mambare itself, and southward down the coast. Then it would seem to have penetrated inland from the coast by two principal routes—up the river Kumusi, and up the thickly populated road from Buna through Sangara to Kokoda. To the Aiga, who are a comparatively isolated tribe, the Taro cult has found its way by both these latter routes, from the east via the river Kumusi, and from the south via Wasida, a populous

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shoulder off the responsibilities on to the spirits. The theory (quite commonly understood) is that the spirit will resent any disrespect or inattention; and that to fail in respect or attention to the Taro man is to offend the spirit itself in the same way; hence the punishment of sickness. If, as one informant said, any one abused a Taro man, the spirit would overhear and enter the body of the abuser. Such, I am told, is the explanation of the queer practice of universal hand-shaking. One must keep on good terms with a Taro man.

### 10. *Sects of the Taro and Variant Cults*

We have already noticed that in the course of its extension the Taro cult has undergone one very profound change, viz. from a worship of the taro spirit to a worship of the dead. But side by side with this there have been many minor changes corresponding with the multiplicity of new prophets and their inspired idiosyncrasies.[1] Such idiosyncrasies may or may not establish themselves in popular favour. Where they have done so they have given rise to more or less pronounced variants. In the first place, however, we might distinguish between (1) the 'sects' of the Taro, and (2) the variant cults which it is the purpose of this section to describe.

There are many varieties of the taro plant, each known by its proper name, such as *Kaiva*, *Porove*, *Ovivi*, *Togoro*, &c. On one occasion I listed as many as seventeen, but the catalogue was still, I believe, incomplete. Now any Taro expert will tell you that he is a *Kaiva* man, or a *Porove* man, or an *Ovivi* man, &c., as the case may be. The varieties of the taro itself afford the basis for a classification of the Taro men, and for these classes I have employed the word 'sect'. Thus each sect is known by the name of a particular variety of the plant.

In any one village the adherents of Taro will probably belong in the majority to one particular sect. This is

[1] Vide pp. 36–7.

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because the initiated is commonly of the same sect as the initiator. Although, as we have seen, the former usually claims direct inspiration for himself, he is still in a great degree indebted to the latter, and acquires from him the ritual of his sect. Differences between sects are indeed not very striking: the actual ritual of the Taro men is throughout almost as uniform as it is simple. It is in the various forms of *jipari* that the differences are most obvious. In the scene at Korisata (pp. 20, 21) we have already noticed the contrasted behaviour of several sects. Other sects developed mannerisms, sometimes indeed going to awkward extremes. The *Papara* men made a practice of rushing aimlessly through the bush, careless of roots and trailers. Frequent abrasions and injuries are said to have cut short the popularity of this sect. The *Mereni* men and the *Togoro* men would crawl on all fours, the former wriggling their bodies violently, the latter beating their foreheads on the ground. The *Pijama* men affected a peculiar hopping movement, quite *sui generis*, but too tiring to remain long in favour.

In some instances the sects adopted a distinctive mark. For instance, the *Togoro* men in some villages smeared their cheeks with white ochre in two streaks, following the line of the mouth. But such marks soon lost their distinctiveness. Being so easily copied they became a rage. One might see everywhere blackened foreheads, shining as if with stove-polish; or limbs and bodies smeared with clay, through which parallel wavy lines were made with the finger-tips. But these had become simply marks of the Taro men, without any distinctive appropriateness to one sect or another. Sometimes, but very rarely, it appears that the particular sect concentrates its attention upon the particular variety of taro after which it is named: thus the *Kaiva*, *Kivere*, *Togoro*, and *Sinogu* sects of Deunia on the river Kumusi declared that they concerned themselves respectively with the *Kaiva*, *Kivere*, *Togoro*, and *Sinogu* varieties of the taro plant. But almost invariably the Taro man, whatever his sect, pro-

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X-794 fesses to promote the growth of all kinds of taro, and
●795 indeed of other garden products as well.

These sects probably have their origin in the early habit of changing the individual's name for a certain taro name. Mr. Elder writes: 'Every man was to be called by a different name, taking the name of some kind of Taro.' The habit of name-changing is a common one with the Orokaiva, and is an interesting as well as a difficult subject in itself. We may probably assume that in this case it arises from a motive of deference. As a feature of the Taro cult, however, the practice appears to have died out: probably it never established itself permanently or extended far beyond the seat of origin, viz. the neighbourhood of the lower Mambare.

The division into sects with taro names never seems to have possessed much importance, and is perhaps already passing out of recognition. We may regard the growth
X-794 of variant cults separately. The most important of them is that of *Diroga*, which has attained a very wide popularity in the southern part of the Division. The adherents of *Diroga* always carry spears, and are consequently called *ki-embo*, or 'spear men'. Some will probably disagree with me in calling the *Diroga* a variety or offshoot of the Taro cult, and will prefer to regard it as an entirely new movement. There are, however, many points in common, and the claim to prosper the garden crops remains the principal justification for the newer order in the south as it does for the original Taro. The most significant difference in regard to purpose is that in the *Diroga* the *curative* activities of the experts come into greater relative prominence. It is a matter of no real importance whether we regard *Diroga* as a new cult or merely as a variety of the old. I propose to give a brief account of its origin and of its distinctive practices and theories. The expression 'Spear men' will be used as equivalent to *Diroga* men, because the spear, though always carried by the Taro man in full dress, has acquired with *Diroga* a new significance.